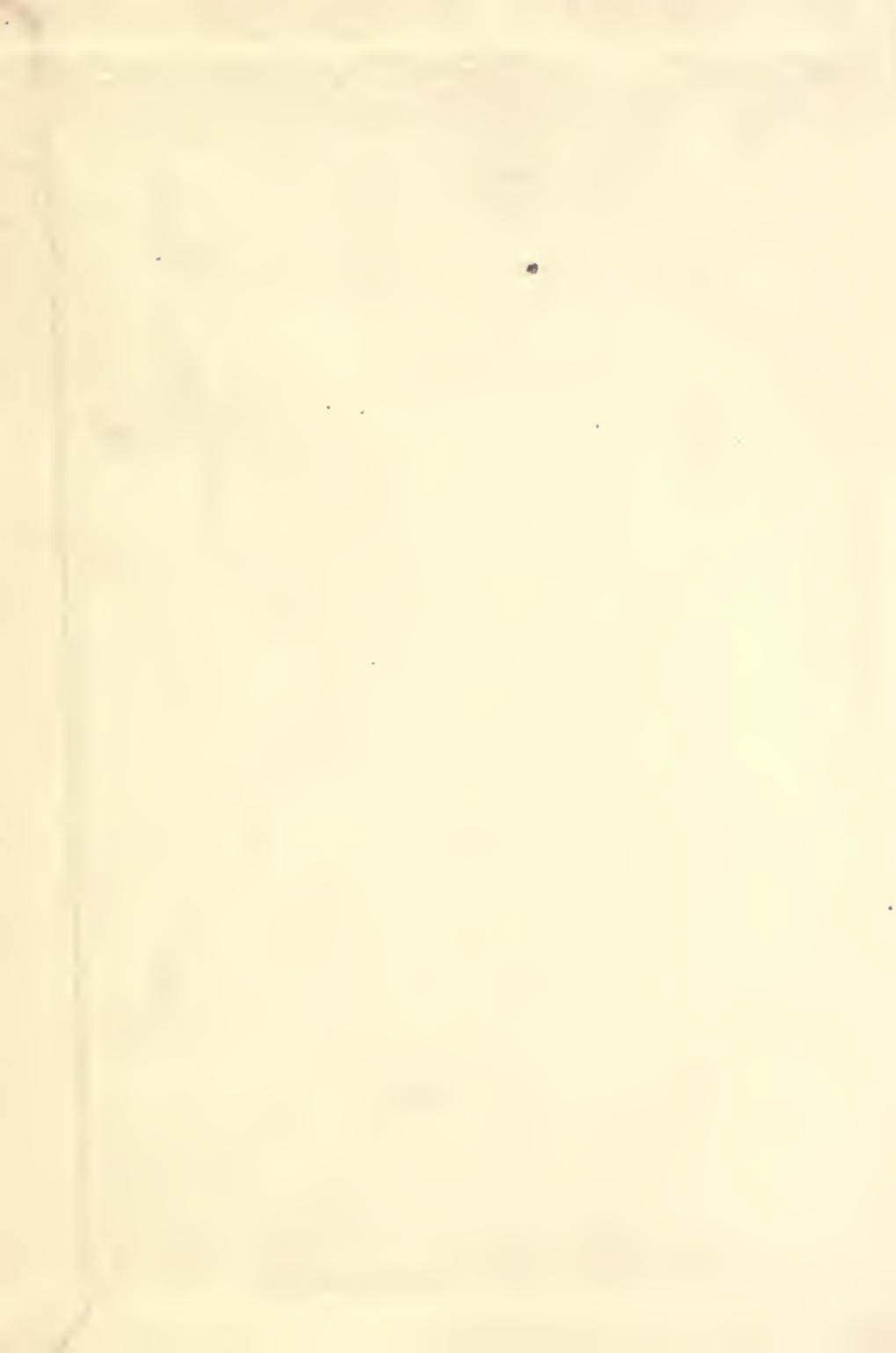


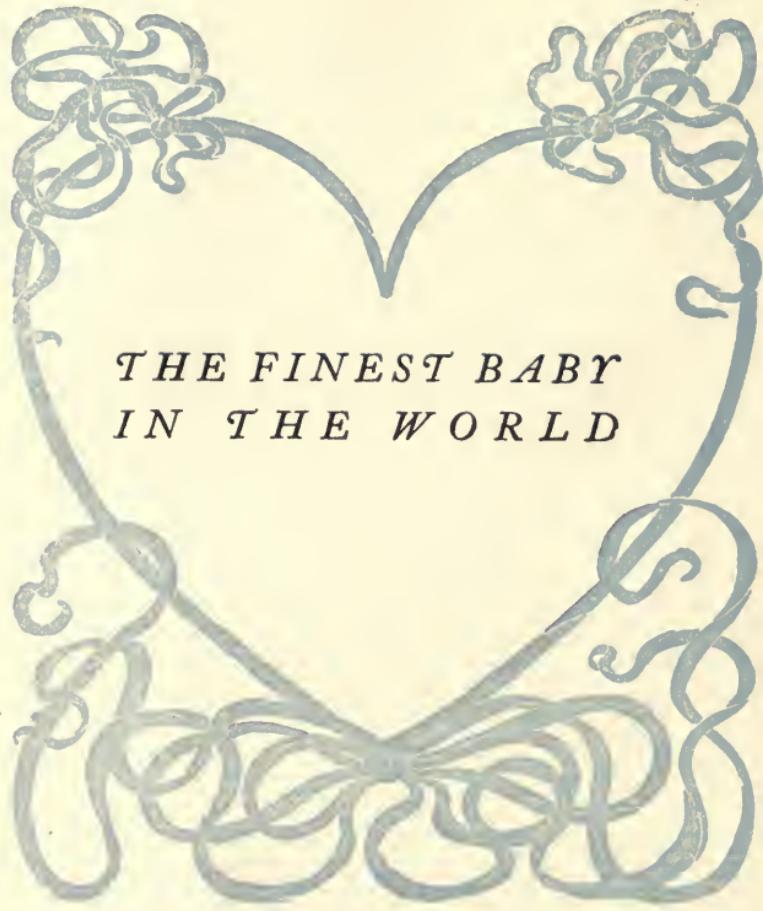
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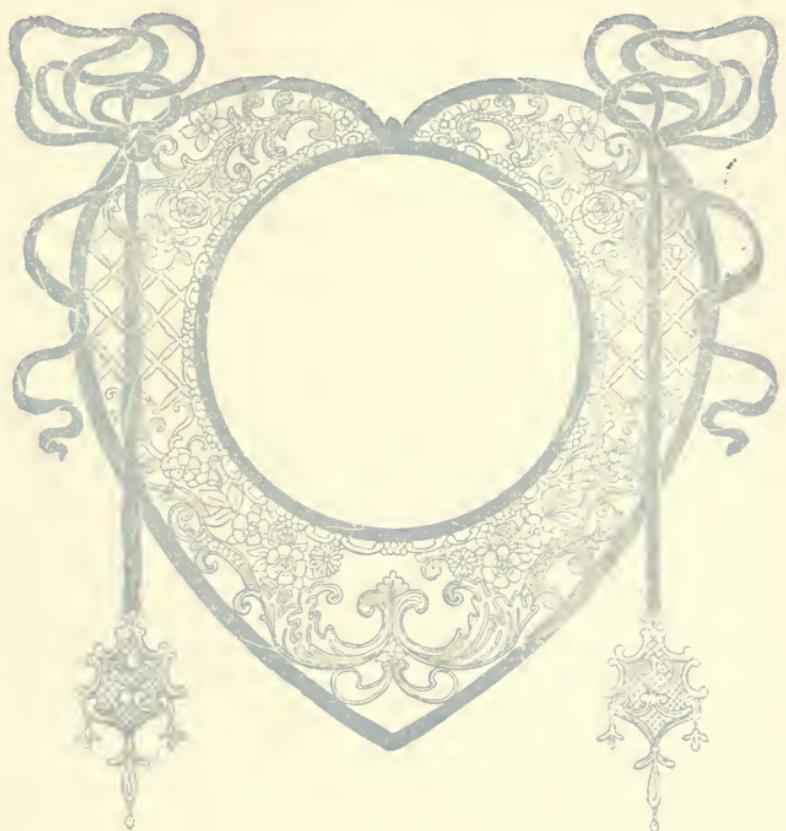
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The
FINEST BABY
IN THE
WORLD
by
THEADORER





*THE FINEST BABY
IN THE WORLD*



The Finest Baby in the World

Being Letters from a Man
to Himself about
his Child

By Theadorer

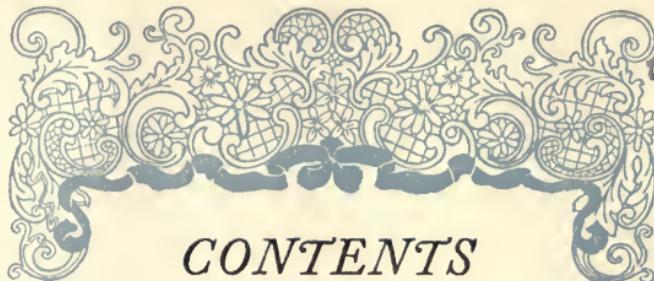
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LETTER No. ONE

The Finest Baby in The World

I AM writing these letters to you because I know that you are quite impartial about children. You yourself are the proud father of a little one, and therefore I am sure you have learned from experience to see the good in other people's babies, while you can be both silent and sensible about your own. You are no child egoist. If I were to write in this fashion to any one else, I would be certain to be misunderstood. But it is different with you. You may perhaps wonder, however, why I do not address these strictly confidential letters to her mother. The reason is, I shall have many occasions to speak of her mother, and it is always invidious to write personalities.

So I write to you. Her mother is—naturally—very partial. You are not. I trust, therefore, that I am not presuming too much on my knowledge of you when I express the conviction that you will regard these letters as strictly private, and not do as so many married men do—hand them over to your wife to read.

You will doubtless wonder why I should call her the Finest Baby in the World—I of all people. Your wonder is quite excusable. For it is a matter of constant surprise to me that parents—more especially mothers—should think their own children the best. It is a matter of common ridicule. Whatever we do or do not do, let us avoid this weakness. For *thinking* that a certain child is the pattern of all the virtues does not always save the child from shocking faults. The children who are most belauded by their mothers are invariably the nastiest little prigs. So pray do not imagine I am partial

when I call her the Finest Baby in the World. I am merely stating an elementary *truth*—just as one might say the day is light and the night is dark. It is not my opinion—it is other people's opinion. Bachelors and old maids have been the foremost to tell me she is that. And bachelors and old maids have nothing to gain by such speeches—unless it be from one another. Yes, every one without a single exception has told me she is the finest child in the world, and I am not going to be such an unmannerly fellow as to disbelieve everybody. Everybody cannot surely be wrong. And yet, we have been so afraid of seeming too eager in our willingness to take other people's opinion, and so timid about trusting to our own, that we have used our own discretion in making actual comparisons. For we find that people do not always tell the truth about babies—especially when addressing the baby's parents. We have therefore taken pains to observe,

with discretion. We have been looking at children everywhere—on the street and in the nursery—in short clothes and long clothes—both boys and girls—dark and fair—of all ages and sizes—and without any previous exchange of confidence between ourselves, each of us has arrived separately at the conclusion that Margaret—our child—is the Finest Baby in the World. This is not a matter of *seeming*, it is a matter of *fact*. Stated by everybody, and confirmed by ourselves. Hence these letters to you.

You know, of course, where we live—in a wide, breezy, upland country, with clean winds, far views of hill and moorland and fertile wooded plains below, and beyond the plains a strip of shining sea on which the ships pass up and down, minding one irresistibly of voyagings to distant lands beyond the margin of the world. When Margaret came, it was in the month of May. The garden was

steeped in sunshine, and the lambs were bleating in the fields. I was sitting in my library, with a wide-open window, painfully transcribing an everlasting long list of signatures from one book to another, much in the way that desperate characters in certain private institutions are set to shift a heap of stones from one place to another. The exercise requires no great thought, but by the mere mechanical action of mind and hand one contrives most wondrously to glue one's attention to one thing and deliberately keep it off another. I could tell you exactly what birds were singing and what flowers were blooming in the garden that day. But no matter. The warm blossom-laden winds of late May came in at the window, and both inside and out the silence was unbroken. How well I remember thinking that from this day everything in that fair outside blossom-laden world and within this quiet home would take a new colour-

ing and have a new meaning—for better, or for worse.

And then—in the middle of a name, the pen went wrong. There was a splutter and a blot. For the stillness was suddenly broken by the strangest and most indescribable sound a man is ever permitted to hear in this queer world—a little small wee voice lifted up in complaint at the newness of things. How much and how little in a sound! It was the awakening out of the “sleep and the forgetting.” Another Traveller stopping for a little at the Wayside Inn. So she came to us trailing her little glory cloud from God. And the light of her little glory cloud made the fair blossom-laden world forever fairer, and the quiet home forever homelier.

Womenfolks said she was like her father—menfolks said she was like her mother—but the wisest people always said she was like us both. We ourselves thought there was nobody else like her. Do not imagine, how-

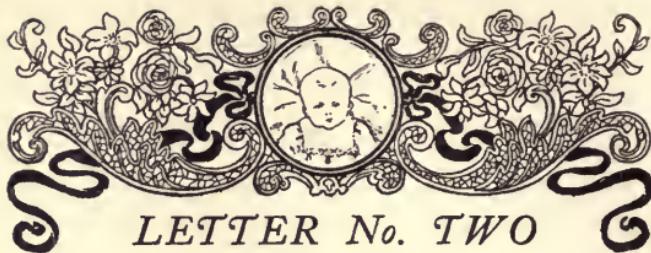
ever, that I mean to distress you with a detailed description of a child which by this time you must know so well. A man never appears at such disadvantage as when he tries to explain what I may call—without offending your sensitive feelings—the salient features and distressful habits of an infant. I have no desire of appearing at any disadvantage, even before you. You are a man. To a man, a child never becomes really unbreakable in the handling until after the twelfth month. Most uncles, a few old maids, and all bachelors have a strong suspicion that babies are brittle. “Lusty” is the word which, from experience, I would suggest. But be that as it may, it is a notorious fact that the average man never appreciates a baby until it has ceased to be a baby—that is, until it can stand, and therefore can be laid down—if necessary—and left. But you are not an average man. At all stages and at all hours, in the day-time and in the night-time, you loved

your child and appreciated your child. Only on rare occasions did you lower yourself by feeling virtuous because you had to sacrifice your sleep—sitting bolt upright with heavy-lidded eyes, by the light of a candle, and with many a yawn and sigh, or perambulating the resounding chamber in the small hours. Bishop Thorold says that whenever a parent begins to feel virtuous in sacrificing his sleep for his child, he ceases to love his child. All I can say is, that the Bishop must have kept a night nurse. But this, at least, was your blessed compensation—that in these twelve educative months you saw the glory of more dawns than you did during the whole period of your previous life.

That is all past. A child becomes an actual personality to be reckoned with at the thirteenth month. Our darling is now rising two years. Hair—golden yellow falling on the shoulders. Eyes—speedwell blue. Cheeks—ruddy brown and chubby. Brow—

high and intellectual, but with the slightest suggestion of anxiety written upon it—like her mother. Add to these, a pair of lusty lungs, two dimpled hands with folded bracelets of pink flesh at the wrists, a brace of restless feet, together with a spirit that is sunny and rampageous turn about. There she is, her mother's pride, her father's doting treasure—the Finest Baby in the World.





LETTER No. TWO

The Mystery of The Dawn

IN my last letter I told you that the Rogue was rising two. Since then she has had a birthday. So now she is rising three. I know your interest in her is unending. I shall therefore write to you about the Daybreak and the Dawn, pointing out to you something of the poetry of childhood, with special reference to early rising. And I shall tell you the truth. People who write about children should always tell the truth. For to translate a child's simplest day into words is to narrate one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The moment we begin to *invent* things which we think children ought to say, we tumble down to the commonplace. With childhood, as indeed with man, it is the actual that is ever the most wonder-

ful. Here, as elsewhere, truth is stranger than fiction. Let me tell you the truth, then, about your child and mine, and you cannot fail to read.

You know as well as I do what her baptismal name is. You were present in the old village church that hot July day she "got her name," as the villagers say. You remember how gay the world looked then, and how the ancient font was wreathed in roses—the choicest blooms out of your own garden, grown under your tender care, and cut the night before with your own hands. The scent of the roses filled the church that drowsy day, and you did not listen to the sermon very much. The doors were standing wide open for air, and you heard the droning of bees and the singing of birds—your own bees, and I might almost say your own birds, for did they not hum and sing in the very garden where she received her earliest impressions of the summer world? You were proud of your

roses that day, you were proud of your baby-girl, but I think you were proudest of all of her mother, and you thanked God there were roses blooming on her cheeks once more.

The name you gave her was Margaret—for *Margarita* means a pearl. And while the ceremony went on, you knew that in a back seat there were two gray-haired men and two benevolent-faced ladies (not so very old) looking on. The men of gray hairs, you could hear, were clearing their throats in a nervous way, as men do when they have a suspicion that they are on the verge of committing a foolishness; and the benevolent ladies you could also hear were fumbling amid a rustle of silk for that most unfindable of all things—the pocket of a Sunday gown. The church was very warm, to be sure—so they sought their handkerchiefs. Ah, tender-hearted grandmothers, and gray-headed grandfathers, you have been through it all! It seems like yesterday since you

scowled at the parson for putting so much water on the darlings' faces—and now, can it actually be these same darlings who are scowling to-day for the same reason? Time flies. But gray heads remember. And memories make the heart grow wondrously tender.

But I am wandering from the point. I shall often wander in these letters. The subject of them is so elusive. She is like a sunbeam—you can never catch her, and she is difficult to describe. That baptismal morn is far away—in time—now. The Pearl, the Rogue, the May Blossom is rising three. I am a country man, so you must excuse that term—savouring however much it may be of colts and fillies.

And now let me tell you something of the early-rising habits of the Pearl. First, I must explain that our days and nights have lost all measured marge or fringe. Night used to begin when we fell asleep, and day was

ushered in with the morning bath and the hot water. But now I am awake when all other folks are asleep, and asleep when all the world is wide awake. Day and night have simply bartered hour for hour without so much as saying By your leave. Indeed, were it not for the fixed hours at which we take our meals, there would be nothing stationary about our life at all. For many months she required maternal *and* paternal instruction every alternate hour of her sleeping-time. Sleep to her was a play-thing—to us, a butterfly we could never catch. Night then became like certain harmonies in the first part of the Moonlight Sonata—plaintive, sad, and long-drawn-out. Our very faces took the colouring of the winter dawns by reason of our much looking upon the pale light, and I can remember that, at times, it took one hundred and forty-three “shoogy shoos” (as she is pleased now to call them) to rock her asleep again in my

arms. But, as the poet Wordsworth aptly has it—

“That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I nor mourn nor murmur : other gifts
Have followed : for such loss I would believe
Abundant recompense.”

These words are autobiographical, and refer to the family difficulties of Wordsworth's early married life, when, as is well known, he was too poor to keep a nurse. Yes, the gifts that follow make a truly abundant recompense—and they would need to do that. For now the Rogue sleeps soundly, but if she does wake up to demand a drink of water it is sure to be when slumber seals our eyelids with a leaden weight. And when one's eyes are drunk with sleep it is so easy to bark one's shins against the dressing-table. Then follows, of dire necessity, a muttered expletive—but strictly under breath. For did one speak it out, she would be sure to

hear, and then would rise a piping voice in the dawn dusk, "What dadda saying, mummum?" And—her mother cannot tell a lie.

To show you what an educative influence a child can have upon a parent, let me here insert a little aside. The other day, when I was working in the garden, the Rogue, who is forever making a show of "helping dadda," lifted the largest rake. She swung it heavily and slowly behind my back, and next moment the finest tulip in the bed was felled to the ground. I exclaimed "By——!" remembering just in time to omit the mention of Jove or Jingo or some such mild deity, lest I should offend her ear. She dropped the rake (on another tulip, of course), stared solemnly up at me, and said, "By ——!" in the self-same tone of voice. Sir, what you do not wish your child to say or do, never say or do yourself.

So in the night-time I suffer many

a barked shin with a stifled breath—and the darling gulps down her water. Then she is laid to rest again in her little red flannel jacket and her long white nightgown. The crib has a side to it that folds down, and is pushed in level with the bed. At least, the crib is *raised* to a level with the bed by having four huge leather-bound volumes of the Imperial Encyclopædia placed one under each leg. This was her father's device to induce sound sleep. Even her dreams now are built upon great and weighty thoughts. I need not tell you that it is your choice to lie beside her—the guardian of the Rogue's repose. She falls asleep again, ragging with her little velvet fingers most wickedly at your neck, while you lie and watch her. The golden hair is parted in the middle, and the blue ribbons still tie it to either side—one lover's knot over each temple. You have still two hours till hot-water time, but you cannot always sleep to order. So your nights are spent in

snatching heavy draughts of slumber on your part, and calling for enormous draughts of water on her part, and watching the wonder of the little sleeper's rosy, dreamlit face between.

You are well aware that our window faces the east. How often you have wondered at the mystery of the dawn as you looked out across the waking world ! The rolling lands and woods lie under a fairy coverlet of silver-gray. Far away the strip of sea stretches east and west, like a leaden girdle to the earth. The three lighthouses wink with sleepless eyes, and send their warning flashes across the northern main. Two long sleepy winks from Fidra, four bright electric winks from the May, and six quick fiery winks from the Bass. It is a glamorous world on which we look down from our upland home and watch the dawnlight putting out the eyes of the sea—and but for the dear Rogue we might never have seen it !

But she stirs. She throws her little

arms about. She sits up. She opens her eyes. She creeps across the heavy breathing form of her guardian. She lays her warm lips against his and kisses him. This is her way of waking us. And then she speaks.

"Want to see the dingle-leeries, dadda—please, dadda."

A grumph, a groan, another kiss, and the blankets heave.

"All right. But who are you?"

"The wee Maid."

"Ah, you're a Rogue."

"Dadda's Rogie pogie," she says, as she holds out her arms to be lifted. But who could ever reproduce the heavenly inflection of her voice as she sings the words?

So she is carried to the window. She looks out. The lighthouses flash and wink and revolve in silent succession far away, telling of some sleepless watchers over the mariner's track. The wonder of the dawn is on her face, and a light of mystery is in her eyes. Who can say what a child

thinks? Who can tell what a child knows? At least, there is some strange battle of ideas going on inside the little head, as the brain tries to lay away with accuracy its impressions of the picture which the blue eyes look upon and convey to it. Then the light grows suddenly brighter. The electric eyes far out at sea begin to pale. Behind the billowy line of hills the sky blushes with a rose of dawn, and while we gaze and gaze, the first shaft of sunrise shoots over the top of Lammerlaw and lays a beam of light across the wooded plains.

Then she speaks one word.

“ Dod ! ”

What more could a wise man say ? What single word could better describe the meaning and mystery of dawn ? God ! What power within the little brain imagined and made choice so unerringly ? Who can tell ?

Then the sun appears, and she speaks again—two words this time.

“ Dod’s dingle-leerie ! ”

“ Yes, little Pearl ; it is God’s dingle-leerie. It is God. He is looking at us.”

“ Yes,” she whispers.

“ And we are not afraid ? ”

“ No.”

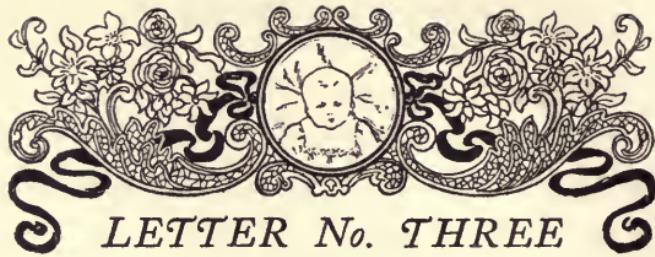
“ Then come to bed again.”

“ For a wee minute, dadda.”

“ All right.”

So we lie down again. And she is soon as sound asleep as ever. The “wee minute” stretches out for two hours. She smiles in her sleep. Nurse tells us that children smile in their sleep when they are seeing angels. It may be. For the little ones see more than we do. If she is smiling now, what wonder ! She has just seen God.





LETTER No. THREE

The Unexpressed Fear

I WISH to write to you this time about a new discovery which her mother and I have made. In the old days, I remember how you used to live alone in those vasty rooms on the north side of the city. Your lodgment was sufficiently aristocratic, but you will permit me to say that for lack of dusting your rooms always looked best in candle-light. That, however, is beside the point. You were once ill in those bachelor days, and you lay one whole night companioned by pain. No one helped you. You had to help yourself. You heard every hour strike. Yet I remember how you told me afterwards that you felt a certain dogged joy in suffering. No one else was made to suffer. So you entered

up the memory of the experience next morning in your private diary—that little book which is written with ink that is both invisible and indelible—and locked it away in your safe.

But, my dear old friend, I have found a pain in which there is no particle of joy. The Pearl has been ill for the first time. We had to look upon her suffering and screaming with pain. Of course it happened at night—that time when everything takes a more tragic colouring. We did not know what was wrong. We could not take the cursed pain away from her. At that moment it would have been a pleasure to thrust hand or foot into a furnace to give her five minutes' respite. To die for her would have seemed so easy that there would have been no self-sacrifice in it. But living is, on the whole, a great deal harder than dying. So we worked away—trying one thing after another—goaded into desperation by the thought that the doctor lived

miles away across the country—until at last we got at the reason of the pain, and applying a remedy, the poor little Rogue gave over clutching at our necks, and was at rest again. We dried her tears. Then she fell asleep.

You ask me if she was very ill. I answer, that there is only one degree in a child's illness, and that is the superlative. To-day she may be dancing and laughing on her mother's knee—to-morrow, who can tell? They are rapid little mortals—soon up and soon down. And when they suffer, those who love them always fear the worst.

Of course it turned out to be but a child's passing trouble. Quick to come, and just as quick to go. But—we saw the Shadow in it. We always see the Shadow in it now. I can remember the first morning we saw the Shadow. She was playing and capering in her high sparred cot. We were dressing. Suddenly we

heard a thud, and looking round, we saw she had tumbled a somersault on to the floor. When we picked her up, the colour had entirely left her face. At that moment she was as good as dead to us. Had she died, we could not have suffered more. We actually *saw* her dead. We rehearsed the process which every mother has sooner or later to go through, and we felt the vital wrench in the heart. And yet—it was only a fall. She will have many such, I suppose, before she gets through. She came to no harm. She was as full of life in half an hour as she had ever been, and just as full of forgetfulness. But *we* did not forget. We had made our first acquaintance with the Shadow.

And so it always is now. There are no little pains to us in her ailments. We go through the same process every time she is ill. We see dangers which may never come. Perhaps the grandmothers would

smile at us. But no—they would not smile, for they know. Every mother knows. Every one who really loves a child knows. We must pay for the exquisite joys of love in a price of pain.

"They suffer most, that most have power to love."

So the unexpressed fear has come to us. It makes us love her so much more. And I think the intensifying of the love is ample compensation for the coming of the Shadow. How the Rogue has let us into the very middle of life! How children teach us the deepness of the water! A man is only half a man until he has a child to teach him the things in life which he cannot possibly know except through fatherhood. No wonder the mystery and its meaning are hidden from the wise and prudent—for the only way of understanding is to learn from babes. As for a woman, she has a sense of motherhood from the begin-

ning, from the first day she holds a doll. But a man—he has to *learn* fatherhood through his child.

At this moment I go next door, from the lamplit room and the company of the book-shelves, and what do I see? A little rosy-faced maiden asleep. The bloom of perfect health is on her cheeks, and the mystery of dreams is playing like a light of heaven over her fast closed eyes. How she was running and rampaging and laughing an hour ago! And now, how sound is her sleep! There is no shadow on that face, no tear on that cheek. Sleep on, priceless pearl. We will not wake you. We love you with a love that often hurts. But we will never tell you about shadows or fears. We will pray now and always to the good God, who came Himself to this world as a child, the Father who understands us better than we can ever understand you—and then, we too will lay ourselves down beside you and sleep.

Little Lamb, asleep and still,
God protect thee from all ill;
Those who love thee ne'er can be
Free from pain in loving thee.

For thou art so wondrous dear,
That their blinded hearts do fear
Lest some shadow fall on thee.
Even Death—they often see !

Foolish hearts ! Thy baby child,
With her face so sweet and mild,
Is in God's own keeping now,
With His glory on her brow.

Love her always, love her well.
And for shadows, who can tell
How God means to pave the way
For the little feet each day ?

Take thy joy and revel in it,
Living through each golden minute,
Trusting God who gave you this
Baby child to love and kiss.





LETTER No. FOUR

My Invisible Spurs

THERE are some things which a man does not care to tell any one else—not even his wife. These are the things which I am going to tell you now. Had I not you to write to, I would not know sometimes where to turn for a confidant. You say a married man should never be at a loss for a listening ear. I know what you mean. But it would never do to tell her. For what I am going to speak about is very vitally connected with her.

The truth is, that of late I have been conscious of strange acute little pains all over my body and—soul. At first they were but trifling things—tiny pricks of fire, as it were, which made one smart and start at all times and on the most absurd occasions. At first I used to think that there

must be a mark left on the flesh, and again and again have I gone and looked at the place where I felt the smart of pain. But there was nothing visible. Yet all these tiny pricks I invariably felt about the same quarter—round the heart, in that portion of the body where man's soul, with all its affections and desires, is supposed by experts to be situate. I went to the family physician and asked if I had heart disease. But he laughed and said No, and told me to go home and be very thankful. I did not understand then what he meant or why he laughed. But I understand now.

The reason why I am now confiding in you is, that of late I have become conscious of *two* pains, and not one. One is a decided sharp stab—the other is a tiny prick. I feel them most when I am idle—so much so, that now I dare not remain idle for any time, else the pains begin to hurt. The moment I start work again, they disappear—somewhat. But be I idle or

busy, they are always there, more or less, and I have got into the habit of calling them my Invisible Spurs.

Now, sir, here is my secret. I have come to the conclusion that the Rogue and her mother are the unconscious authors of these pricks. They are my Invisible Spurs. They goad me on more incessantly than the Hebrew ploughman of old did his oxen in the fields. And yet the dear things are all unconscious of the sharpness of the spurs. Does any man feel that he is losing his grip of things and that his ambitions and desires are slipping away from him? Then let him acquire just such a pair of spurs. Let him take his own way of acquiring them. But Invisible Spurs are the only hope for the man who is sliding into indifference. Only—let him remember that once he has obtained possession of the Spurs, he cannot lay them aside when he finds they are stinging him with a painful persistency. There are some things which

you cannot sell. Nay, never since the world began has any true man desired to bargain about his Spurs.

You know by this time what I mean. For you yourself in the old days were an expert in the art of taking things easy. When the hot summer days came, you remember how you used to tumble into a hammock under the trees and dream the hours away, careless of aught else but your enjoyment of the moments as they crawled like lazy dogs across the sunlit lawn. You took your holidays greedily, and always came back feeling you could have done very well with more. You were the victim of many desires and ambitions, but what did it matter though you never realized them! You had no one to work for, and it is a poor thing to make oneself the goal of one's ambitions. Yes, you were a pleasant, easy-going man in those days. There was nothing specially objectionable about you, but there was certainly nothing specially

strenuous about you. You dug your heels into many a horse and made the poor brute fly across the turf like a streak of lightning, but you never felt the prick of the spurs yourself.

Now it is all changed. It is your turn to feel the spurs. You are the horse, my friend, and not the rider. It is sometimes difficult to believe that I am you—the same man as the hammock-dreamer, who in the long ago criticised at leisure the passing hours. It is true, all the same, and yet it is not true. The Invisible Spurs have made all the difference. You are a new creature since you felt the pricks. You have been tumbled out of your hammock, and all your pleasure now is in rocking some one else in it. You try sometimes to sit still in the garden on the summer days and dream the old dreams. But you do not sit long. You have lost the art of idling. You jump to your feet smarting. Oh, these awful Spurs !

“What is the matter ? Why can’t

you sit still for a little?" asks her mother.

And what can you say? Like a stupid fool, you *hum* and *haw* for a while, and then, when their backs are turned, slink into the house and take off your coat and send the pen flying over the clean fresh sheets. You dare not tell *her* about the Spurs. It is now one of the pathetic secrets of your life, that when the Rogue and her mother wish to idle an hour with them, you always excuse yourself, and appear churlish by going and doing something. They do not understand. Why should they? You could never think of charging these two dear souls with giving your pain. This is one of the inevitable and inexplicable messes into which matrimony lands a well-intentioned man. Do not try to explain. Let the secret rest. It is better they should never know.

So you have made up your mind to be permanently unsettled, constantly ambitious, never content with your-

self, always planning some new work. When you go for a holiday now, you are no sooner away than the Spurs begin their deadly work, and you wish you were back again. When you run into town for a day, you stop, of course, to have a look at the shop windows. Another prick or two, and a voice whispers, "Buy this for the one, and that for the other, and do without yon for yourself." Your very income has been overhauled, and you spend it on a new principle. You measure it now by the price of costumes and small frocks—not, as of old, by first editions and Elzevirs. You have become a very restless mortal indeed. Even when the day is done, and you be slumbering in the quiet room, you start in your sleep again and again. You used to slumber like a mahogany log—now you are one of the lightest of sleepers. A Spur pricks you. A little hand touches your face like a silken pad of velvet in the dark—you take it in your own strong hand and

remember the line which expresses the prayer of a distressed soul seeking God in the gloom !

"Hold Thou my hands."

Then you lie awake, and stare at the guttering light in the still room. You wish the morning would come, that you might get up and begin to work again for them both. Strange, past all strangeness, that the touch of a little velvet hand in the night should have the same effect upon you as the lash of the driver on the slave. But the little soft hand and the knotted whip are surely not the same ! The whip drives by law—the tiny hand by love.

So now you know something of the joy which seeks men in this life and finds them through pain. It is the thrice blessed pain of the Spurs Invisible. You would not be without them for the world. The pricks keep you alive. The day you can no longer feel their pain, that day you will die.

I am sitting writing all this to you in my garden on a midsummer day, beneath the shade of the trees. The air is full of the droning of bees. The birds are singing happily among the branches. A sweet scent of blossom is wafted on every breath of the southland wind. It is a day to do nothing but dream. Then, a sound above every sound in Nature! A little silver voice! And the Rogue comes up the sunlit pathway, holding her mother's hand. Look at them! The Bit Ladye is dressed in a great broad-brimmed garden hat and a summery gown, with a bunch of crimson roses at her belt; and the Rogue, in pink cotton and sandals, twinkles along at her side. In the little hand is grasped a strangely assorted bunch of wild flowers—dandelions, buttercups, daisies, and weeds! And when she shows them proudly to her father, it is to be feared that she calls the first-named flowers *dam-the-lions*.

There they are—so happy, so un-

conscious, and so gay, in the garden path. If I could only sit still! But no. The Spurs have begun to prick already. My sorrow, how they hurt! I am on my feet in a moment.

“Why can’t you sit still now, and put away your writing on a lovely day like this?” exclaims she of the crimson roses.

If she only knew!

“My dear, I have just something to finish, and will be back presently.”

And I disappear.

They stand gazing after me in astonishment, and marvel at the mood of churlish industry which seems to contradict the very spirit of the summer day. I wish with all my heart to stay, but I dare not. Pearl Margaret and the Mother of Pearl cast reproachful glances after me. I can *feel* them looking at me. And yet, ah yet—if they only knew, it is all a matter of Invisible Spurs!



LETTER No. FIVE

A Haunted House

THEY have both gone away. I am here alone. I need not explain why I write to you this time. It was a bright warm day when they went away, with the usual small stir at the garden gate—a hansom followed by a cart with the trunks and the odds and ends. Yes, you have guessed aright. I was in the cart. Do you remember the days when you used to go away on holiday with a bag in one hand and a fishing-rod in the other? You will never go away like that again. For the mystery of your triple happiness is now very largely a matter of hat boxes and dress trunks. But then, was this not the motto which you put on her wedding-ring, "*Cum te omnia, sine te nihil*"? It is your motto still. So holiday means

the Bit Ladye. And if she goes, the Rogue must go. And if the Rogue goes, Nurse must go. Step in, then—one, two, three, and by this time you will understand there is no room for me. So I follow in the cart with the gather-ups.

Here, then, is the ratio of your old life to your new life :—

As one travelling bag is to one hansom multiplied by one cart, one go-cart, one bicycyle, with trunks, wraps, hat boxes, and a maid : so is a bachelor unattached to the Finest Baby in the World. Take the square of your pocket-book on your return home, and you will realize the measure of the smallest denominator in the world.

That, sir, is your matrimonial equation, to a fraction !

But to return. Of course I went with them all the way, and stayed for a day or two. But very soon the Spurs began to work havoc with the leisure hours. So I returned to-day—

to work. I am alone. The house is like a tomb. The six clocks, which it is my delight to hear ticking and striking together, are run down. I stood in the hall, on entering, and listened. Not a sound but the chirping of a sparrow outside. I walked into the nursery and opened the shutters. Why did I go in there first? By instinct, I suppose. In the corner was a great heap of toys, and on the table lay a hatless doll *in extremis*. The sight of the doll affected me much in the same way as a man is affected when he sees a ghost. In the dining-room, by the organ, I found a very tattered Bible lying on the floor. It is the book which the Rogue holds upside down at prayers. Out of it, she sings all her hymns in a stentorian voice of many keys. I lifted the book, and all the time it was in my hand I heard her little voice singing most distinctly —

“We are but little children weak,
Nor born to any high estate.”

Up-stairs, in the corner of the bedroom, was her little cot—painfully neat and trim and empty. From sheer custom, I walked in on tiptoe and listened to hear if she was sleeping soundly. I know nothing so full of speech as an empty cot. You will not be surprised to hear that I reached over and tossed the miniature blankets into an untidy heap and made a dent in the middle of the snow-white pillow. There was some satisfaction in doing that.

The ghastliness of the sheeted drawing-room made me shiver next. At the door my foot kicked against the handle of a tiny carpet-sweeper. What extraordinary things in the most unexpected places! I lifted the toy and began to run it back and forward on the floor with short, quick strokes. It brought her, by some magic of association, to my side in an instant.

The last room I entered, strange to say, was my own. It used to be the

first. But this also is reversed. Everything is reversed now. I look at the mantel-shelf, and the first thing I see is a photograph of a little fair-haired lady in a bridal dress and veil. It seems but yesterday since that veil was first raised in the vestry. There, on the other side, against a background of dark velvet, are a number of miniatures. She is there at all stages—the Rogue! And her mother too, from the time—long ago now—when she held a doll in her arms and looked with anxious eyes for the first time into the mouth of a camera. And see, now the Rogue is the image of what her mother was then! On the three lowest book-shelves the books are shoved in untidily, here and there. That was the work of the little velvet hands. That third shelf is the very measure of her highest reach. She has tried a thousand times to get at the fourth shelf, but she cannot. So on the five upper shelves the books are hopelessly tidy

and even. Yonder, too, in the corner, hang a guitar and a fiddle by the side of the piano—to these she dances with wonderful pit-a-pat steps on the winter afternoons, when the candles are lit at four, and the curtains are close drawn, and the fire roars in the chimney.

Hopeless, hopeless, hopeless—this is no preserve of yours. Your own room is no longer your own. You call it Sanctum—but you are beginning to learn that sanctity is not made of self. On the very glass of the window, as you look out, you see the mark of two little sticky fingers that she must have drawn over the pane when last her mother held her up to see.

Sit down, poor forlorn fool, and rest. Your survey is over. You are in a haunted house. Nothing here is yours. No room is sanctuary. Everything tells the same tale. For everything is related to a fair-haired maid of two. The house is full of

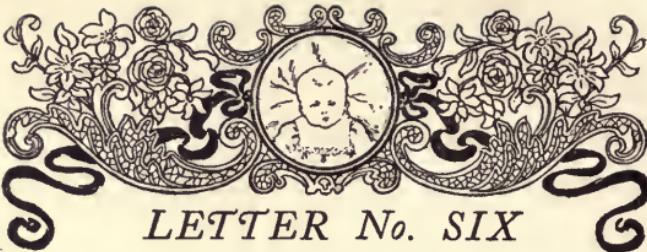
tongues and yet it is ringing up and down with a horrid silence. Rise up and set your clocks agoing. *Ticktock, ticktock* says the Wag-at-the-Wa' on the stair. Then another and another, until the whole house is full of chimes. But even the chimes sound hollow. There is an echo still. Yes, there will always be an echo now when you are alone. You have come home to find that your house has been taken from you. Room by room, the Robbers have stripped you of—yourself! The sound of the Robbers' feet is the echo which you hear in the silent house. You thought you could obliterate a baby's presence in your house—but the baby has obliterated you. You thought you could tidy up and sweep away the dusty little footmarks. But to efface every suggestion of her you would have to burn your house down to the ground. And even then you could not get rid of yourself and your love for her.

No, they are not here, these two. And yet, most mystic of all alchemies, they are here all the time! You thought you would leave them and come back to work alone, so you travelled seventy miles. But you have brought them with you. They are in your heart. The atmosphere which you breathe in these empty rooms—they have made it. A haunted house is your home, now and for all time. But you are not very much afraid of the ghosts!

In the darkness you stretch out your arm and feel for a little form. But the cot is empty, and your hand falls on a dented pillow. You used to think you could not sleep for the perpetual caress of a velvet hand, but now you cannot sleep for the want of it. So you lie and think. You try to understand it all. If this were to go on always, what a hall of ghosts a man's life would become! Is this how a man feels when ——! But no. I cannot put down that thought even

in a letter to you. There was no light burning in the room that night. There was no need of one. And it was well.





LETTER No. SIX

The Conclusion of The Whole Matter

THIS will be my last letter to you for the present. I am going to write to you about the conclusion of the whole matter. For I know that your thoughts are often very long and wistful when you try to spell out the Eternal. Your religion is a very real thing to you, although you talk so little about it. With all your knowledge you know so little, and yet you are always trying to probe the Unseen. You once told me that in the School of God the wisest man never gets beyond the infant class. I thought it a strange idea at first, but now I know it is true. For in the matter of the Eternities a man's only hope of learning is to remain in the infant class. Children invariably

have the ear of God first. They have been in His company last. So they come to us trailing their little glory clouds. Is it any wonder that Christ once said these things were hid from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes? I see now that it could not have been otherwise.

I am not going to preach a sermon to you. I could not even if I tried. That is parson's work. But I find the Rogue has taught me so many parables of life in little, that I should like to pass them on to you.

You used to long for some definite proof of God. All thoughtful men long for that. And I have found the best living parable of the Eternal in the Pearl. You know what her mother is to her. She is as God to her. I believe in God now, because I believe in a mother. When I see the daily miracle of motherhood, it would be unthinkable to me if you and I had no such daily motherhood in the Eternal. We could do just as well

without a God as the Rogue could do without her mother. A man would have as little meaning without a God as a child without a mother. You will find it useless to *argue* with a sceptic about God—arguments help so little—and you cannot demonstrate the Unseen in black and white. But before a man says there is no God, ask him if he can explain away the miracle of a mother. He will not be able to do it, for he cannot explain away himself. And when you have got him to realize the miracle of motherhood he will not be very far from believing in a God. Do not *hurry* his faith after that, but wait until he has a child of his own. Then he will find it as easy to believe as it was once easy to doubt. This may be nursery theology, but I expect it is good enough for you and me.

I remember also how you used to be oppressed with the mystery of pain. Not long afterwards, a friend introduced you to James Hinton's priceless

little book. In those days you often wished that pain could have been left out when God made man. But whatever is left out of life, pain never is. The other day, a thorn ran into the Rogue's finger. Of course she came to me to have it taken out. You do not imagine it gave me any pleasure to probe the little finger with a needle and hear her screaming with pain. It hurt me more to make her cry than it did her to suffer. And if God is to take the thorn out of your flesh and mine—however mysteriously it may have got in—I do not think He will be able to make us perfectly free from pain without probing us, any more than I was able to extract the thorn without the needle-prick. You justify me entirely when I inflict the pain on the Rogue, for you know my motive in pricking her. Why not give God credit for the same motive, and justify Him to yourself every time you have to suffer! We may think ourselves kind to our own children—but, de-

pend upon it, God is far kinder to us. For it is not likely that, when He made man, He would make him kinder than Himself.

And why should Providence be unthinkable to you? Do you not act Providence to your own child daily? Your eye is always on her. She is never out of your sight. Even in the night-time the light in the room burns low, and you can actually see her every movement and anticipate her every wish. When she awakes, you are there. When she is asleep, you are there. You are always there, and she does not know it. In the day-time, from an upper window or from your seat on the lawn, you watch her playing in the garden. The nettles on the roadside troubled you terribly for a time, for you could not keep her away from them. So one day you actually allowed her to touch a nettle. It hurt you to let her hurt herself. But it was good for her. She never goes near a nettle now. You help her

over the rough stones on the road. When she sees them, she stops and lifts up her hands to you and says, "Father, carry me over the big stones —please, father." And you carry her. You stand between her and every danger. She holds your hand and presses it nervously when she is afraid. You act Providence literally to your child, by day and by night, and in spite of her mingled tears and smiles no one could do better for her than you do. Do you think, then, that God does less for you than you do for your own child? Your care is a thing which her little brain cannot understand, and God's Providence is a miracle which you can never fathom. It is a mystery to me why men will not believe of God what they constantly believe of themselves. Which, surely, is an arrogant egotism. I think one of the reasons why God gives us children at all is that we may be able to understand our relation to Him in their daily relation to us, and

to see in our care over them a parable of His care over us. It should be easier for us to find God when we have children. If a child does not introduce a man to the Eternal, nothing else will. If you and I fully understood the significance of our children, there would be no need for us to go to church. A child is the greatest living revealer of the Eternal in this world. You are nearer God when you have your child in your arms than at any other time. Oh, foolish man! You have been wondering for years, in your library among your books, what God is like, and what means He will some day take of introducing you to Himself—and all the while there has been a baby climbing on your knee! That is God's way of bringing heaven into your home and into your heart. What the Christ Unseen has not been able to complete in you, let the little velvet fingers of your living Baby Christ finish. And if ever you are in any danger of be-

traying your trust to your child, or of showing yourself unworthy within the vision of her wondering eye, remember what Christ once said about a millstone and the depths of the sea.

I know, without your telling me, that you—like many another parent—must often wonder in the quietness of the sleepless hours what happens to children when they are taken away. Where do they go? and what do they do all the time? and how long will it be until they sit on their mother's knee again? Just as long as the visit lasts. For when the Rogue goes away visiting, as she sometimes does, to fling her love and kisses broadcast in that Westland country from which we ourselves have come, I am as one bereaved. I have actually lost her for a little while. But I try not to grudge her. It is for her good. And I know she will come back again. I have only to lay my cheek now against her warm chubby face to feel how inde-

scribable the coming back is. And so I have faith that it will be with all who have lost children. They have only gone to visit elsewhere. Why not another world as well as another countryside? They are throwing their love and kisses broadcast in the land of the setting sun. Children are needed there as well as here. For heaven without children would be a poorer place than earth. Have patience, then, and do not grudge them the change of scene. Think of them there exactly as you like best to think of them, and you will please God. They are missing you just as much as you are missing them—it may be. They will come back to you one day, when you least expect it, and when you meet them in the sunset they will appear so much more beautiful that you will be glad, after all, they went away to get that look on their faces which they could never have got here. They were yours before they went—they are yours all

the time they are away—they shall be yours again.

These are the words which you must speak to the mothers of your acquaintance—the mothers who know what I mean—the mothers who will never forget. And for yourself, take the dear Rogue up in your arms and kiss her with a thankful heart as you never did before.



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